



Weekly Briefing

**Montenegro political briefing:
Montenegro's security undermined from inside
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Montenegro's security undermined from inside

Summary

Numerous events, including the election of the president of the Parliament and final formation of a new government, point to the vulnerability of Montenegro in terms of its security policy. This vulnerability is partly due to the interference of other states in the internal politics of Montenegro. However, in addition, the very formation of the new government indicates that there are internal factors and entities that could pose a threat to Montenegrin security policy. This primarily refers to the participation of nationalist pro-Serbian parties in the government, but also those parties that declare themselves democratic and which are also very close to the implementation of Serbian national interests in Montenegro.

Introduction

On the last day of October, Montenegro voted for a new president of the Parliament¹, who is the leader of the most radical pro-Serbian party in Montenegro. Also, a few hours later, along with violations of the Constitution of Montenegro², a new 44th Government of Montenegro was voted in, whose Prime Minister is from the ranks of the Europe Now Movement (PES).³ Although this government was long awaited, its composition indicates that Montenegro is moving away from orientation towards European integration, regardless of the fact that the members of that government are rhetorically committed to further integration. In addition, numerous incidents of interference by neighboring countries and their officials in the internal affairs of Montenegro were registered in October, as well as social events within Montenegro that further undermine Montenegrin sovereignty.

¹ Andrija Mandić elected president of the Assembly, protests in Podgorica <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/videos/2023/10/30/andrija-mandic-izabran-za-predsjednika-skupstine-cg-protesti-u-pogorici>

² First of all – violation of the Constitution and the law! <https://www.pobjeda.me/clanak/prvo-pa-krsenje-ustava-i-zakona>

³ Elected 44th Government of Montenegro <https://www.gov.me/clanak/izabarana-44-vlada-crnc-gore>

The election of the president of the parliament and the new government - a possible danger for Montenegrin sovereignty and security

Montenegro is therefore facing serious internal challenges that threaten its security and stability. A person whose ideological profile indicates that his election could change the foreign policy orientation of Montenegro, but also threaten the country's sovereignty, was elected as the new president of the Montenegrin parliament. The reason for this is that this person openly supports the ideology that cooperated with the occupier in anti-fascist Montenegro, and his party never recognized his own state as independent. The election of such a person as the president of the Montenegrin parliament did not go unnoticed by the media from the countries of the region, which emphasized the pro-Serbian and pro-Russian influence on the new head of the Montenegrin parliament, but also what is most dangerous for Montenegro – these media recognized his anti-Montenegrin attitude and adherence to the idea of "Chetniks"⁴. In addition, elected person is openly against Montenegro's membership in the NATO alliance, which was achieved in 2017. This raises serious questions about the country's future security within NATO, especially when considering Russia's presence in the region.

This election of person who previously openly undermined the citizens' concept of Montenegro as a state and who sought and received Serbian citizenship after Montenegrin independence, is an internal threat to Montenegro that has been recognized by numerous political analysts and actors, not only from Montenegro, but also from around the world. The comments and reactions of regional media clearly indicate the internal threats that the country is currently experiencing.

Namely, such a choice, according to regional sources, caused concern due to expressed pro-Russian and pro-Serbian attitudes. So, for example, the Croatian portal "Jutarnji.hr" calls him a "pro-Russian player"⁵, while "HRT" claims that he was chosen as a "Chetnik duke"⁶. These labels reflect deep divisions in Montenegro. The Bosnian-Herzegovinian portal "Klix.ba" points out that the election of Mandić caused concern in the USA and the EU, which suggests

⁴ Chetniks were members of military formations that collaborated with the Nazi occupier during World War II, and committed numerous war crimes and ethnic cleansing during that period.

⁵ Pro-Russian player elected head of Montenegrin parliament: 'Chetnik dukes are no longer what they used to be...'
<https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/proruski-igrac-izabran-za-sefa-crnogorskog-parlamentar-nisu-ni-cetnicke-vojvode-vise-sto-su-nekad-bili-15389504>

⁶ Chetnik duke Andrija Mandić was elected president of the Montenegrin parliament
<https://vijesti.hrt.hr/svijet/cetnicki-vojvoda-andrija-mandic-izabran-za-predsjednika-crnogorskog-parlamentar-11119533>

that his views directed towards Russia and Serbia were opposed to the goals of the Euro-Atlantic integration of Montenegro.⁷ Such divisions within the country create insecurity and make the path towards European integration, which Montenegro wanted to achieve, more difficult. Serbian "Danas" additionally investigates the biography of new president of Montenegrin parliament, and quotes his statement that "Serbs in Montenegro are closer to Serbs from the surrounding area than to Montenegrins".⁸ This clearly indicates his support for Serbian nationalism and creating a sense of closeness with other Serbian regions, which can lead to internal divisions and instability in Montenegro. "Radio Free Europe" goes a step further and marks the mentioned election of the president of the parliament as "the election of Putin's hero."⁹ This label suggests a close connection with Russian interests, which may have serious consequences for Montenegrin independence and security.

In addition, it is also seen public resistance and protests by citizens, who express their concern about this election and fear of losing Montenegrin independence and sovereignty. Banners with messages such as "No to the Chetnik Government", "We do not kiss chains", "Death to Fascism", "Mandić out", "Vučić, you will break your teeth about Montenegro"¹⁰ etc., point to the huge resistance to backward ideologies, but also deep divisions in society. The immediate consequences of such internal divisions and elections (such as for the president of the parliament) may include destabilization of the country, weakening of trust in institutions, difficulties in implementing reforms, slowing down in European integration, and increased risk of conflicts. Montenegro is facing internal challenges that require careful management in order to preserve its security and stability.

Therefore, the election of a problematic person (who is still accused of attempting to cause a coup d'état in 2016) as the president of the Montenegrin parliament, and related reactions and

⁷ Montenegro is getting a new government today, headed by the pro-Serbian Andrija Mandić <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/regija/crna-gora-danas-dobija-novu-vladu-na-celu-skupstine-prosrpski-orijentirani-andrija-mandic/231030022>

⁸ "He claims that the Serbs in Montenegro are closer to the surrounding Serbs than to the Montenegrins": Who is Andrija Mandić, the new president of the Montenegrin parliament? <https://www.danas.rs/svet/region/ko-je-andrija-mandic/>

⁹ Putin's 'hero' elected president of Montenegrin parliament <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/crna-gora-skupstina-predsjednik-andrija-mandic/32659441.html>

¹⁰ Protest in Podgorica: We do not recognize Mandić as the President of the Parliament <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/crna-gora-podgorica-protest-skupstina-andrija-mandic/32660441.html>

events clearly indicate serious internal threats that endanger the security of Montenegro. These divisions and disagreements within society must be carefully addressed in order to ensure the future of Montenegro as a sovereign and stable state.

However, this is not the only threat to Montenegro from within. A special issue relates to the fact that the new government is dominantly composed of parties that, in an open or hidden form, are closer to the interests of the Church of Serbia than to the interests of Montenegro as a state. They have shown this countless times when indictments were not brought against the priests of this church who openly spread hatred and speeches calling for bloodshed.¹¹ On the other hand, captured institutions such as the prosecutor's office also show attachment to such interests. The recent filing of a complaint against an intellectual¹² who condemned the behavior of the aforementioned church with arguments is just another proof of the captivity of the prosecution institutions, which should be independent. This kind of procedure of the prosecutor's office, which put itself in the service of the Church of Serbia, was met with numerous condemnations by intellectuals.¹³ The indictment against the freely expressed and supported by arguments condemnation of this religious institution is actually the consequence of the visible political influence of the Church of Serbia in Montenegro. During the previous three years, the Faculty of Montenegrin Language and Literature and prominent intellectuals from this institution were under continuous attack from the authorities and media that are close to Serbian nationalistic interests. However, the latest indictment shows that the freedom of academic expression and the independence of educational institutions in Montenegro are seriously threatened.

However, the newly elected government is predominantly composed of representatives of the PES, whose representatives during the election night, for example, were bothered by the statement "Montenegro is eternal", which is an integral part of the Montenegrin national anthem, but they did not mind the celebration of their victory with the flags of Serbia and not

¹¹ "Unification or Ukrainization" - a call for bloodshed, war and genocide? <https://gradski.me/383795-2/>

¹² The higher prosecutor's office is demanding punishment for Boban Batrićević because of the column <https://www.cdm.me/hronika/vise-tuzilastvo-trazi-kaznu-za-bobana-batricevica-zbog-kolumne/>

¹³ FCJK regarding the accusations against Batrićević: The prosecutor's request indicates that the state of Montenegro has announced a hunt for intellectuals and dissidents <https://www.cdm.me/drustvo/fcjk-povodom-optuzbi-protiv-batricevica-zahtjev-tuziteljske-pokazatelj-da-je-drzava-crna-gora-objavila-lov-na-intelektualce-i-neistomisljenike/>

Montenegro.¹⁴ Also, the radical Serbian parties that were once part of the united Democratic Front will, in addition to the position of president of the parliament, receive positions of secretaries in the ministries, and positions "in depth" in the new government (which means numerous positions in state institutions, education, agencies, etc.). Apart from them, there are also the Democrats who, according to the party line, after the 2020 elections, employed thousands of their employees in state-owned companies and thereby threatened the sustainability of those companies, and many of their members are also known for their pro-Serbian views. The Socialist People's Party (SNP) is also at a similar level, given that the Democrats were created by splitting off from the SNP. The introduction of certain Albanian parties into power is a move intended to hide the anti-Montenegrin and anti-citizen character of the new government. Furthermore, the presence of different ethnic and political groups except Montenegrins¹⁵ in power can lead to mutual conflicts and power struggles, which could destabilize the internal situation in the country.

Prime Minister's refusal to read the exposé to the MPs and citizens of Montenegro further fuels doubts about the sincerity of the government's commitment to Montenegrin interests. Such a procedure raises the question of respect for the constitution and citizens and reduces the transparency of the government and causes a lack of trust in the political process. It should not be forgotten that it was PES that achieved a good election result based on the promise of an enormous increase in the amount of average salaries and pensions within just one year. Nevertheless, it seems that the refusal to read the exposé and discuss the planned program to increase salaries and pensions indicates the absence of such a plan and deception in order to reach the power.

In addition, recently, political officials from neighboring countries made several statements that threaten the sovereignty of Montenegro. The new Montenegrin authorities tolerated such statements lightly and did not condemn them significantly. This additionally indicates that such statements are not undesirable to the new Montenegrin authorities, but perhaps they secretly harbor the same affinities as those who made the same statements. Thus, on several occasions, the statement of the representative of the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who stated that Montenegro should disappear as a state by forming a joint state

¹⁴ Milatović does not mind celebrating with Serbian flags: It should not be dramatized, Montenegro is a country of diversity <https://www.standard.co.me/politika/milatovicu-ne-smeta-slavlje-uz-zastave-srbije-ne-treba-to-dramatizovati-crna-gora-je-zemlja-razlicitosti/>

¹⁵ Montenegrins are the only nation that is forbidden to participate in the government in their own country <https://gradski.me/crnogorci-su-jedini-narod-kojem-je-u-vlastitoj-drzavi-zabranjeno-da-participira-u-vlasti/>

with Serbia and the part of Bosnia and Herzegovina where Serbs predominantly live¹⁶, was tacitly tolerated. This is intended not only to deny Montenegrin statehood, but also to impose on Montenegro the epithet of a Serbian state in which there is no Montenegrin nation, which is the most dominant. In this context, the statement of the President of Serbia, who is very interested in conducting a population census in Montenegro and makes constant pressure and interferes, is also obvious.¹⁷ The falsification of data on the percentage of Serbs living in Montenegro is currently possible because through the power and support of the previous government, which was often called by the opposition as the "Quisling" one, it was possible for the recruited census enumerators to be exclusively members of the most radical Serbian party in Montenegro, while the list of enumerators almost never included those who declared themselves Montenegrins or representatives of minority peoples.

Therefore, with the election of a new government in Montenegro, the country faces serious challenges and threats to its security and stability. The new political landscape, where the government consists of different parties with pronounced foreign influence, raises serious questions about the future of Montenegro as a democratic state that is formally on the way to European integration. The composition of the new government, which consists of parties with pro-Russian and pro-Serbian positions, represents a challenge for Montenegro's future relations with the West, especially with the European Union. This government may slow down or prevent the further process of European integration, which could lead to destabilization and loss of support and resources provided by the EU.

Additional tensions and suspicions of the bad intentions of the government, which may have consequences for the security of Montenegro, is the issue of the population census. The new government's decision to postpone the census by just one month¹⁸, which is highly controversial and politically coloured, may cause tensions within the country. Such a decision actually represents a false compromise because complex issues related to the transparency of

¹⁶ Dodik is not giving up: Republika Srpska and Montenegro should be in one state, that will happen <https://www.cdm.me/svijet/region/dodik-ponavlja-republika-srpska-i-crna-gora-trebaju-bitu-u-jednoj-drzavi-to-ce-se-desiti/>

¹⁷ Vučić: Only those who say the worst about Serbia can enter the Government of Montenegro, there will be no census because there will be more Serbs <https://www.cdm.me/svijet/region/vucic-u-vladu-crne-gore-mogu-samo-oni-koji-govore-najgore-o-srbiji-nece-popis-jer-ce-srba-biti-vise/>

¹⁸ Spajić: Census postponed until November 30, there will be no additional costs <https://www.cdm.me/politika/spajic-popis-odlozen-do-30-novembra-nece-bitu-dodatnih-troskova/>

the census and the selection of new census commissions, enumerators and instructors cannot be resolved within a month. The pro-Montenegrin opposition has already called for a boycott of the census if the demands for a fair and transparent census are not met.¹⁹, claiming that this move aims to threaten the Montenegrin identity and state. This can lead to further tensions and potential conflicts. A boycott of the census is becoming more and more certain. This boycott has the potential to cause a serious crisis in the country, given the wide differences in political views and interests surrounding the census. This can cause additional tensions and destabilization of society.

The very composition of the government and the announcement of its reconstruction in a year also indicate that this government will not be stable. The reasons are numerous - from excessive expectations of the public (due to excessive promises), an unstable majority that may give in to the pressure of foreign powers, or even different interests of the parties to favour certain centres of power, identity issues, etc. In any case, the internal instability will certainly continue, and maybe deepened by the social frictions that will inevitably be present.

True or false concern of the West?

The USA has already expressed concern about such political events in Montenegro and appealed for caution.²⁰ It is important to emphasize that the new government should be responsible for its set goals, which include full membership of Montenegro in the European Union and active membership in the NATO alliance. However, the question arises whether this government will really pursue those goals or whether it will be directly influenced by pro-Russian and pro-Serbian political groups. This is exactly where we come to the key question: is the election of a new government exactly the intention of the US, whose diplomacy is "lukewarm" and one might say "dishonestly" resents the entry of radical pro-Serbian parties into the government? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to take a broader look at the overall situation in the region, where American diplomacy seems to "flirt" with Serbian authorities in order to turn it towards the US interests.

¹⁹ The census boycott campaign in Montenegro has begun <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/popis-crna-gora-dps-bojkot/32652152.html>

²⁰ US Embassy: We call for caution, we are concerned about parties that can hinder the progress of Montenegro <https://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/ambasada-sad-pozivamo-na-oprez-zabrinuti-smo-zbog-stranaka-koje-mogu-sprijeciti-napredak-crne-gore>

The fact is that the modern world is facing numerous challenges and complicated relations between countries. One of such cases is the American policy towards Montenegro. Many people wonder why America supports certain political and ideological groups in Montenegro, and such a relationship raises doubts about its real intention.

In order to better understand the US policy towards Montenegro, it is necessary to look historically at the fact that the policy of the USA at global level was often reduced to a military, economic and political dominating position, and its interests were often placed above the sovereignty of other countries. Such a policy was often aimed at supporting coups in free and independent countries, which often made those countries politically and economically dependent. We don't need much evidence for the active role of US diplomacy, but also of individual ambassadors of EU countries in the change of Montenegrin government in 2020, when it was pro-Serbian forces with the help of quasi/reformists who came to the power. Immediately before those elections, there were frequent meetings between the American ambassador in Montenegro and the highest representatives of the Church of Serbia in Montenegro.²¹ Therefore, an opinion was slowly formed among independent intellectuals that the recent USA's concern about the events in Montenegro is insincere and that the USA supports the pro-Serbian groups in Montenegro for its own populist and economic interests. Doubts about such concern become clearer when analyzing its long-term policy and interest in the Balkans. Its actions in the region often reflected the goals of domination and preservation of its own interests. The situation is no different with the official Brussels, whose representatives mostly emphasize the oft-repeated sentences about supporting Montenegro on its path towards full membership in the European Union (EU).²² The fact that the embassies of some EU countries directly influenced the 2020 election result by prohibiting Montenegrin citizens who were temporarily in those countries to vote.²³ Hence, it is hard to expect that EU will more significantly condemn disruptive and anti-European factors within the Montenegrin government, which is strange if they really want Montenegro in their composition soon.

²¹ The US ambassador met with Amfilohije <https://www.pobjeda.me/clanak/ambasadorka-sad-sastala-se-sa-amfilohijem>

²² Von der Leyen kept silent in response to the question: Why is the EU silent on Vučić's interference in the internal affairs of Montenegro <https://www.aktuelno.me/politika/fon-der-lajen-danas-u-crnoj-gori-3/>

²³ Governments of Germany and Luxembourg: Whoever votes in Montenegro should stay there! <http://www.barskiportal.com/lat/politika/vlade-njemačke-i-luksemburga-ko-glasi-u-crnoj-gori-neka-tamo-i-ostane.php>

Nevertheless, the West's rhetorical concern for the situation in Montenegro causes many questions and controversies. There is a well-founded suspicion that, even if it exists, this concern may be more related to geopolitical interests than to genuine concern for democratic processes and human rights in Montenegro. As the situation develops, it will be important to carefully monitor how relations between the EU and the US will develop towards the new Montenegrin government.

The latest political events, such as the election of the "Chetnik duke" as president of the Montenegrin parliament, illustrate the deep divisions and radicalization of the political scene. This increases tensions and creates the risk of further polarization of society. Given these political changes, it can be said that Montenegro is facing serious challenges in preserving its internal stability. In addition, the structure of the new government in Montenegro, composed of parties with pro-Russian and pro-Serbian views, creates serious challenges and threats to the security of the country. Stability, European integration and NATO membership are key elements of Montenegro's security, and their threat can lead to destabilization and insecurity in the country. Not only the future of Montenegro is at risk, but also potentially the security of the region. Outside the region, global players also play a key role in the stability of the Balkans. Their interests, influence and policies can further complicate the situation. Montenegro is on its way to membership in the European Union, but these internal and external threats can significantly slow down that process. In response to the challenges that threaten the stability and security of Montenegro, it is necessary that all relevant actors recognize the seriousness of the situation and act together in order to preserve the country's peaceful and stable future. This includes the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, and support for independent institutions in Montenegro. Also, it is crucial to work on suppressing extremism and nationalism, which are destroying the civic spirit of Montenegro.